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Andrews University memoirs on John Fetzer

The Trust's historian Larry Massie found the following documents at Andrews University in July, 2011:

"The Radio Lighthouse," a senior research paper, Allen Forrester, 1997

"8AZ to WKZO," 9/16/1993, a short memoir by C.F. ("Fred") Clarke, who worked for John on the EMC radio station

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"The Radio Lighthouse," a senior research paper, 1997
snippets from the paper

John E. Fetzer, a student at E.M.C. ... [was] described as "working hard" that January of 1924 to get the station on the air ... the station's mission: the spreading of the gospel. John Fetzer wrote, "We are very grateful, indeed, that God is using this mysterious means of cheering hearts and leading them to a fuller knowledge of things eternal."

The station, whose call letters at this time were KFGZ, had the potential to reach millions of listeners ... listeners reported in from Maine, Florida, the state of Washington, Texas, and Northern Alberta Canada.

The station began broadcasting that fall [of 1924] ... on the air approximately six and one half hours a week and ... the station was hoping to receive a class "B" license.

In 1925, as a result of petitions to the United State Department of Commerce by Pearce [P.N. Pearce, a teacher of English at the college and KFGZ's program and publicity manager] and Fetzer, who was now the station's chief engineer, KFGZ's call letters were changed to WEMC ... WEMC ... received the sought after Class "B" license ... this meant that WEMC could not use music boxes or victrolas in its broadcasting.

During this period, "The Radio Lighthouse Music Makers: provided music for the station [was Rhea Yeager part of the group, as cellist? most likely]. They were joined on the air by musical saws solos, broadcasts by the French department, sermons and choir concerts. ... Also ... the Student Movement [the school newspaper] carried an advertisement for Hansen Radio Shop in Niles, Michigan. One of the selling points for their radios, which cost five dollars, was that you

could use then to head WEMC.

In April and May of 1925, Pearce and Fetzer gave reports on the station to the EMC Board of Trustees ... the board voted to raise two thousand dollars for better studio equipment and permission was given to solicit five thousand dollars from churches in the "Lake Union Conference" [the area Adventist governing body]. The Fund raising was successful.

1926: ... the board of trustees must have found the engineering services of John Fetzer to be valuable. The board voted him a salary of twenty five dollars a week. In July of 1926 came the first hints of money troubles "The Radio Lighthouse" reported a deficit of two thousand dollars ... the EMC Board of Trustees voted in September of 1926 to make the station the same as any other department in the college ... [and] ... even though there was support for transferring control of "The Radio Lighthouse" to the Lake Union, the board voted that it should remain a department of the college. [In December, 1926] Even though he did not ask for it, chief engineer John Fetzer also received a raise. The board did, however, caution the Radio Committed to use the ten-thousand dollars appropriated for the station's operations carefully so there would be no more deficits.

[The station continued to burn through money, however, for the last 6 months of 1927 the deficit was \$562.81]

The Board of Trustees voted in February of 1928 ... [to] ...negotiate with the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists for a joint meeting of the EMC Board ... and the treasury department of the General Conference to work out a budget for the station. This may be a sign that the Board of Trustees was beginning to think that WEMC was too much for the college to handle alone. ... the station was now broadcasting at one kilowatt of power. The EMC Board voted to appropriate \$14,000 dollars for radio station operations in that year.

In 1929 the question of the advisability of supporting a radio station at EMC was formally put forward. The EMC Board voted in February ... to request that the Lake Union Conference set up a committee to study that question. In May of that year ... at [the] meeting of the Board, the budget for 1929-30 was proposed and accepted. ... The total expenses for the operation of the station were forecast to be \$13,894.

The year 1930 brought the beginning of the end for "The Radio Lighthouse." In the January 27th meeting of the Board it was decided to empower John Fetzer to deal with a Mr. Howard Pierce on the sale of the radio station to a Mr. George Trendle ... the total sale price was to be \$42,000.

In early March [1930] the Board voted to extend Mr. Trendle's option to buy [twice] ... and to give John Fetzer a commission if the station was sold before September 30.

The Board of the college voted in April of 1930 to stop programming on WEMC

one week before the end of the 1929-30 school year.

At a May 1930 minority meeting of the Board, [Fetzer] was put in charge of disposing of the station as a whole or piece by piece. He himself, however, was interested in purchasing the station.

In January of 1932 EMC's assistant business manager ... reported to the Board on the sale of WEMC to Mr. Fetzer. For all the equipment of the station and the rights to the broadcasting license John Fetzer paid EMC only \$2,000 -- five hundred down and one hundred per month until paid in full. ... with the new call letters WKZO ... Fetzer moved the station to Kalamazoo and went on to make a fortune in broadcasting.

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"W8AZ to WKZO"

snippets from the memoir:

The first regular programme was given on the 24th of March 1924 ... A small studio had been constructed in a corner of the attic connected to Mr. Pearson's classroom. In view of its purpose it was always called "The Radio Lighthouse." The call letters assigned to it were KFGZ by the Radio Commission which was then a branch of the Department of Commerce. A few days before this programme an inspection had been arranged by this Commission, to test the station's output quality. ... I remember John telling of their experience. It seems that the inspectors were quite satisfied with the general station and its layout, so they arranged to have it begin broadcasting while they drove out a ways and listened for quality and steadiness of signal. John and George were both on hand in the transmitter room, [and] when they started the station, something went wrong and NO signal resulted. They could find no visible reason why. Then they both got down on their knees and asked the Lord to help them, and again turned on the station and all worked well. However, after the inspectors left the station again refused to work and it took them several days to find and fix the trouble. They used to tell how the Lord had signally helped in this emergency.

I think John got a very good deal when he finally bought the station. He had lost all loyalty to the church or the cause which had inspired him to work so hard in its initial development. When he joined the Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo, he told me it was because it was the largest church in town. At the time he needed influence and financial help in his budding institution. Radio was in its infancy at that time and we were in the beginning of an extreme financial crisis.